

My name is Jim Laffer. I am hard of hearing. I work for a company named CaptionCall which builds and distributes captioned telephones for people with hearing loss. I am also a client and have been using a captioned telephone since the earliest ones hit the market back in 2000 when I lived in Chicago which was a test market. I am also the local group leader of the Association for Late Deafened Adults (ALDA) here in San Jose and am heavily involved in a cochlear implant self-help group called the Bionic Ear Association (BEA). Working to improve the lives of people with hearing loss is something I care deeply about. I consider it my life work.

When I started working for CaptionCall the requirements to get a captioned telephone were simple - self-certify that you had a hearing loss and ask for the phone. Then in February of this year the FCC changed the policy. Now potential clients need to be certified by a hearing professional to get a phone for free or pay \$75 if they don't have access to a doctor who can sign the form. CaptionCall worked hard to comply and employees are well trained to only install the phone for people who have a doctor's certification.

Today it came to my attention that the FCC is considering further changes to the requirements for getting and using a captioned telephone. These changes include:

- 1) The FCC would like to prevent anyone from receiving a captioning telephone for free. Instead, everyone would be required to pay a minimum of \$75 to receive a captioning telephone and participate in this service.
- 2) The FCC would also require any CaptionCall customers who have already received a CaptionCall phone at no cost to provide certification of hearing loss from a hearing care professional or other medical professional in order to continue using it.
- 3) The FCC is still pushing to require captions be set to the "OFF" position at the beginning of each call, even when a hard-of-hearing consumer lives alone or only with other hard-of-hearing people. As proposed, the only way for CaptionCall to set the default on a customer's phone to captioning "ON" is for the user to provide a doctor's certification that they are either mentally or physically unable to do this.

These proposed rules changes strike me as troublesome and potentially discriminatory. After all the whole point of the Telephone Relay Service fund is to give hard of hearing/deaf people access to the telephone on the same level that hearing people enjoy. The more hoops people have to jump through to do that the less equal it becomes. This product restores not just the ability to make a call in an emergency but restores contact with the outside world and encourages communication. CaptionCall clients continue to lead robust social lives and stay in touch with friends and family. This strikes at the very heart of the sense of isolation that hearing loss creates opening a world of possibilities where

before there was only silence. As someone who suffered with severe to profound hearing for 15+ years prior to my first cochlear implant surgery two years ago, I can attest to how easy it is to lose touch with friends and family due to hearing loss. Captioned telephones make a huge difference in people's lives.

I have to admit I am confused by the rule changes the FCC is proposing. Why would you want to throw up financial barriers or take away phones from people who already have them? 80% of my clients are elderly and live on fixed incomes. Many of them live alone. Some of them call me almost monthly because they are confused by something and would like help. Every service call we make is free to the client. Every phone we provide is free if they have the certification. That is by CaptionCall's choice. Now the FCC is proposing telling current clients they need to become certified for the phone all over again or have it taken away and telling new clients, no captioned phone unless you can afford one. How many people will simply turn away and simply accept that they can no longer use the telephone.

I ask you quite simply, what good is having a program that helps people if the government keeps enacting barriers that prevents people from accessing it? If the issue is financial, the solution isn't to reduce access but rather to make the fund stronger through appropriations or higher taxes on telephone bills.

Please don't cut off this vital tool for those who need it most. Please don't let them take away our phones or make it harder to get one. Make the FCC live up to it's promise. Honor the spirit of the ADA and continue to allow people with hearing loss easy access to this life changing technology. I ask this not just as a CaptionCall employee but as someone who understands the issues that confront people with hearing loss each and every day. Please don't turn your back on us, the world does that enough.